

How to Achieve Peace

I have just (March 12/25) read in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (No. 517 of March 24) the following telegraphic dispatch from Berlin:

“It is reported from Sweden that Maxim Gorky has sent the government and the Executive Committee greetings couched in enthusiastic terms. He greets the people’s victory over the lords of reaction and calls upon all Russia’s sons to help erect the edifice of the new Russian state. At the same time he urges the government to crown the cause of emancipation by concluding peace. It must not, he says, be peace at any price; Russia now has less reason than ever to strive for peace at any price. It must be a peace that will enable Russia to live in honour among the other nations of the earth. Mankind has shed much blood; the new government would render not only Russia, but all mankind, the greatest service if it succeeded in concluding an early peace.”

That is how Maxim Gorky’s letter is reported.

It is with deep chagrin that one reads this letter, impregnated through and through with stock philistine prejudices. The author of these lines has had many occasions, in meetings with Gorky in Capri, to warn and reproach him for his political mistakes. Gorky parried these reproaches with his inimitable charming smile and with the ingenuous remark: “I know I am a bad Marxist. And besides, we artists are all somewhat irresponsible.” It is not easy to argue against that.

There can be no doubt that Gorky’s is an enormous artistic talent which has been, and will be, of great benefit to the world proletarian movement. But why should Gorky meddle in politics?

In my opinion, Gorky’s letter expresses prejudices that are exceedingly widespread not only among the petty bourgeoisie, but also among a section of the workers under its influence. *All* the energies of our Party, all the efforts of the class-conscious workers, must be concentrated on a persistent, persevering, all-round struggle against these prejudices.

The tsarist government began and waged the present war as an *imperialist*, predatory war to rob and strangle weak nations. The government of the Guchkovs and Milyukovs, which is a landlord and capitalist government, is forced to continue, and wants to continue, *this very same kind* of war. To urge that government to conclude a democratic peace is like preaching virtue to brothel keepers.

Let me explain what is meant.

What is imperialism?

In my *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, the manuscript of which was delivered to the Parus Publishers some time before the revolution, was accepted by them and announced in the magazine *Letopis*,^[3] I answered this question as follows:

“Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun; in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed” ([Chapter VII of the above-mentioned book](#), the publication of which was announced in *Letopis*, when the censorship still existed, under the title: “Modern Capitalism”, by V. Ilyin).^[1]

The whole thing hinges on the fact that capital has grown to huge dimensions. Associations of a small number of the biggest capitalists (cartels, syndicates, trusts) manipulate *billions* and divide the whole world among themselves. The world has been *completely* divided up. The war was brought on by the clash of the two most powerful groups of multimillionaires, Anglo-French and German, for the *redivision* of the world.

The Anglo-French group of capitalists wants first to rob Germany, deprive her of her colonies (nearly all of which have already been seized), and then to rob Turkey.

The German group of capitalists wants to seize Turkey for *itself* and to compensate itself for the loss of its colonies by seizing neighbouring small states (Belgium, Serbia, Rumania).

This is the real truth; it is being concealed by all sorts of bourgeois lies about a “liberating”, “national” war, a “war for right and justice”, and similar jingle with which the capitalists always fool the common people.

Russia is waging this war with foreign money. Russian capital is a *partner* of Anglo-French capital. Russia is waging the war in order to rob Armenia, Turkey, Galicia.

Guchkov, Lvov and Milyukov, our present ministers, are not chance comers. They are the representatives and leaders of the entire landlord and capitalist class. They are *bound* by the interests of capital. The capitalists can no more renounce their interests than a man can lift himself by his bootstraps.

Secondly, Guchkov-Milyukov and Co. are *bound* by Anglo-French capital. They have waged, and are still waging, the war with foreign money. They have borrowed billions, promising to pay *hundreds of millions* in interest *every year*, and to squeeze this *tribute* out of the Russian workers and Russian peasants.

Thirdly, Guchkov-Milyukov and Co. are *bound* to England, France, Italy, Japan and other groups of robber capitalists by direct *treaties* concerning the predatory aims of this war. These treaties were concluded by *Tsar Nicholas II*. Guchkov-Milyukov and Co. took advantage of the workers' struggle against the tsarist monarchy to seize power, and *they have confirmed the treaties* concluded by the tsar.

This was done by the whole of the Guchkov-Milyukov government in a manifesto which the St. Petersburg Telegraph Agency circulated on March 7(20): "The government [of Guchkov and Milyukov] will faithfully abide by all the treaties that bind us with other powers," says the manifesto. Milyukov, the new Minister for Foreign Affairs, said the *same thing* in his telegram of March 5 (18), 1917 to all Russian representatives abroad.

These are all *secret* treaties, and Milyukov and Co. *refuse* to make them public for two reasons: (1) they fear the people, who are opposed to the predatory war; (2) they are bound by Anglo-French capital which insists that the treaties remain secret. But every newspaper reader who has followed events knows that these treaties envisage the robbery of China by Japan; of Persia, Armenia, Turkey (especially Constantinople) and Galicia by Russia; of Albania by Italy; of Turkey and the German colonies by France and England, etc.

This is how things stand.

Hence, to urge the Guchkov-Milyukov government to conclude a speedy, honest, democratic and good-neighbourly peace is like the good village priest urging the landlords and the merchants to "walk in the way of God", to love their neighbours and to turn the other cheek. The landlords and merchants listen to these sermons,

continue to oppress and rob the people and praise the priest for his ability to console and pacify the “muzhiks”.

Exactly the same role is played—consciously or unconsciously—by all those who in the present imperialist war address pious peace appeals to the bourgeois governments. The bourgeois governments either refuse to listen to such appeals and even prohibit them, or they allow them to be made and assure all and sundry that they are only fighting to conclude the speediest and “justest” peace, and that all the blame lies with the enemy. Actually, talking peace to *bourgeois* governments turns out to be *deception of the people*.

The groups of capitalists who have drenched the world in blood for the sake of dividing territories, markets and concessions *cannot* conclude an “honourable” peace. They can conclude only a *shameful* peace, a peace based on *the division of the spoils, on the partition of Turkey and the colonies*.

Moreover, the Guchkov-Milyukov government is in general opposed to peace at the present moment, because the “*only*” “loot” it would get *now* would be Armenia and part of Galicia, whereas it *also* wants to get Constantinople *and* re gain from the Germans Poland, which tsarism has always so inhumanly and shamelessly oppressed. Further, the Guchkov Milyukov government is, in essence, only the agent of Anglo-French capital, which wants to retain the colonies it has wrested from Germany and, *on top of that*, compel Germany hand back Belgium and part of France. Anglo-French capital helped the Guchkovs and Milyukovs remove Nicholas II in order that they might help it to “vanquish” Germany.

What, then, is to be done?

To achieve peace (and still more to achieve a really democratic, a really honourable peace), it is necessary that political power be in the hands of *the workers and poorest peasants*, not the landlords and capitalists. The latter represent an insignificant minority of the population, and the capitalists, as everybody knows, are making fantastic profits out of the war.

The workers and poorest peasants are the *vast* majority of the population. They are not making profit out of the war; on the contrary, they are being reduced to ruin and starvation. They are bound neither by capital nor by the treaties between the predatory groups of capitalists; they *can* and sincerely want to end the war.

If political power in Russia were in the hands of the *Soviets of Workers’, Soldiers’ and Peasants’ Deputies*, these Soviets, and the *All-Russia Soviet* elected by them,

could, and no doubt would, agree to carry out the peace programme which our Party (the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party) [outlined as early as October 13, 1915, in No. 47](#) of its Central Organ, *Sotsial-Demokrat*^[2] (then published in Geneva because of the Draconic tsarist censorship).

This programme would probably be the following:

- 1) The All-Russia Soviet of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies (or the St. Petersburg Soviet temporarily acting for it) would forthwith declare that it is *not* bound by *any* treaties concluded *either* by the tsarist monarchy *or* by the bourgeois governments.
- 2) It would forthwith publish *all* these treaties in order to hold up to public shame the predatory aims of the tsarist monarchy and of *all* the bourgeois governments without exception.
- 3) It would forthwith publicly call upon *all* the belligerent powers to conclude an *immediate armistice*.
- 4) It would immediately bring to the knowledge of all the people our, the workers' and peasants *peace terms*:
 - liberation of *all* colonies;
 - liberation of *all* dependent, oppressed and unequal nations.
- 5) It would declare that it expects nothing good from the bourgeois governments and calls upon the workers of all countries to overthrow them and to transfer all political power to Soviets of Workers' Deputies.
- 6) It would declare that the *capitalist gentry themselves* can repay the billions of debts contracted by the bourgeois governments to wage this criminal, predatory war, and that the workers and peasants *refuse to recognise* these debts. To pay the interest on these loans would mean paying the capitalists *tribute* for many years for having graciously allowed the workers to kill one another in order that the capitalists might divide the spoils.

Workers and peasants!—the Soviet of Workers' Deputies would say—are you willing to pay these gentry, the capitalists, *hundreds of millions* of roubles *every year* for a war waged for the division of the African colonies, Turkey, etc.?

For *these* peace terms the Soviet of Workers' Deputies would, in my opinion, agree to *wage war* against *any* bourgeois government and against *all* the bourgeois

governments of the world, because this would really be a just war, because *all* the workers and toilers in *all* countries would *work for its success*.

The German worker now sees that the bellicose monarchy in Russia is being replaced by a *bellicose* republic, a republic of capitalists who want to continue the imperialist war, and who have confirmed the predatory treaties of the tsarist monarchy.

Judge for yourselves, can the German worker trust *such* a republic?

Judge for yourselves, can the war continue, can the capitalist domination continue on earth, if the Russian people, always sustained by the living memories of the great Revolution of 1905, win complete freedom and transfer all political power to the Soviets of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies?

N. Lenin

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Published according to the manuscript.

LETTERS FROM AFAR

Notes

[\[1\]](#) [PLACEHOLDER FOOTNOTE.] —*Lenin*

[\[2\]](#) [PLACEHOLDER FOOTNOTE.] —*Lenin*

[\[3\]](#) *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* was written in the first half of 1910,[1916?] and on June 19 (July 2) was sent to Petrograd via Paris. It was to have been published by the Parus publishing house which, on Maxim Gorky's initiative, was putting out a series of popular surveys of West-European countries involved in the war. Lenin maintained contact with the publishers through the editor of the series, M. N. Pokrovsky. On September 29, 1916, Gorky wrote Pokrovsky in Paris that Lenin's book was "really excellent" and would be put out in addition to the regular series. However, the Parus editors strongly objected to Lenin's criticism of Kautsky's renegade position and substantially altered the text, deleting all criticism

of Kautsky's theory of ultra-imperialism and distorting a number of Lenin's formulations The book was finally published in mid-1917 with a preface by Lenin, dated April 26.

Parus (Sail) and *Letopis* (Annals)—the names of the publishing house and magazine founded by Gorky in Petrograd.

Letopis—a magazine of literature science and politics whose contributors included former Bolsheviks (the Machists V. A. Bazarov and A. A. Bogdanov) and Mensheviks. Gorky was literary editor, and among the other prominent writers contributing to *Letopis* were Alexander Blok, Valeri Bryusov, Fyodor Gladkov, Sergei Yesenin, A. V. Lunacharsky, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Vyacheslav Shishkov and A. Chaplygin. *Letopis* appeared from December 1915 to December 1917. The Pares publishing house existed from 1915 through 1918.

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